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Former CIA Director Stansfield Turner said Wednesday a bill calling for advance congressional approval of secret military operations abroad would be unconstitutional and might endanger the lives of U.S. agents.

The retired admiral, who headed the intelligence agency under President Carter, said the bill "clearly transcends the intent of the Constitution" by requiring the president to get the consent of Congress for covert operations.

Testifying in the House Intelligence Committee, Turner said it also would endanger agents by increasing the risk of leaks by members of Congress and their staff members.

But Rep. Wyche Fowler Jr., D-Ga., the bill's author, said the requirement would be limited only to secret paramilitary and military operations, and would not affect normal intelligence gathering.

He assured Turner he will seek changes in the bill to ensure secrecy for the identities of agents.

Fowler also agreed with another witness, former Sen. Birch Bayh, D-Ind., that leaks are just as likely to occur in the executive branch as in Congress.

Bayh, a former chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said he had been "very frustrated" by executive branch leaks during his chairmanship of the panel.

He said he did not know of any leaks from Congress at that time.

"The real place where you have leaks is the executive branch," Bayh said.

Bayh also agreed with Fowler that it would be impossible to keep secret the kind of military aid now being provided Nicaraguan insurgents, even if there were no leaks from Congress or the executive branch.

The former senator said it was important for Congress to have more voice in the authorization of covert military operations because members are closer to the public and better able to weigh what impact the operations may have on public opinion.

Bayh also expressed some reservations over a provision in Fowler's bill allowing the president to order a covert operation without the advance consent of the House and Senate intelligence panels.

Executive branch lawyers, he said, will "find a loophole in it."

Morton Halperin, director of the Center for National Security Studies, urged support of the proposal that paramilitary operations must have prior approval of Congress.

Halperin said congressional foreign affairs committees as well as both the House and Senate intelligence committees should be kept fully informed, and that any "questionable actions" should be brought to the attention of Congress.